# Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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# BASICS

## Description

- A condition characterized by:
  - Chronic abdominal pain associated with:
    - Alteration in bowel habits *AND*
    - Absence of organic pathology.
- May be characterized as diarrhea predominant or constipation predominant; or may alternate between diarrhea and constipation.
- Synonym(s): Spastic colon; Irritable colon

## Epidemiology

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) accounts for up to 50% of GI visits in some practices:

- Second to upper respiratory infection as cause for lost workdays

## Prevalence

- 5–10% of the population of North America:
  - However, only 15% of these patients actually seek medical attention.
- Predominant age: 20–39 years
- If age >50 years, consider other diagnoses.
- Predominant sex: In the US, Female > Male (2:1)
- Common in low socioeconomic community

## Etiology and Pathophysiology

- The etiology is unknown, but patients demonstrate intestinal motility abnormalities with enhanced sensitivity to visceral stimuli.
- The trigger may be luminal or environmental.

## Genetics

Unknown, but more common in families of IBS patients

## Risk Factors

- Other family members with similar GI disorder
- History of childhood sexual abuse
- Sexual/Domestic abuse in women
- Depression
- Can occur after an infectious colitis (**1**)

No risk to mother or fetus

## General Prevention

See “Diet.”

## Associated Conditions

- Migraine
- Urinary frequency and urgency
- Fibromyalgia
- Dyspareunia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Posttraumatic stress disorder

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